

## Constantine

occurrence between earth and heaven. The doubl conflagration is certainly suspicious, but tyrant do not, as a rule, set fire to their own palaces whei they themselves are in residence, however strong may be their animus against some obnoxious part^ in the State.

A few months passed and Diocletian published ; second edict ordering the arrest of all bishops an< clergy who refused to surrender their " holy books to the civil officers. Then, in the following yeai came a third, offering freedom to all in prison if the; consented to sacrifice, and instructing magistrates t use every possible means to compel the obstinat to abandon their faith. These edicts provoked frenzy of persecution, and Gaul and Britain alon enjoyed comparative immunity. Constantius coul not, indeed, entirely disregard an order which bor the joint names of the two Augusti, but he too care that there was no over- zealousness, and, a< cording to a well-known passage of Lactantius, h allowed the meeting-places of the Christians, th buildings of wood and stone which could easily b restored, to be torn down, but preserved in safet the true temple of God, viz., the bodies of H: worshippers.\* Elsewhere the persecution may b traced from province to province and from city t city in the mournful and poignant documents know as the *Passions of the Martyrs*. Naturally it varie in intensity according to local conditions and accon

ing to the personal predilections of the magistrate

\* **V**erum autem Dei templum, quod est in hominibus, incoliu servavit. (*De Mort<sub>t</sub> Per sec.*, c. 15).